

Core Humanities Program, City College Center for Worker Education



Marlene Clark

City College Center for Worker Education (CWE)

Program History and General Description:

Founded 25 years ago, The City College Center for Worker Education (CWE) recently became a division of the college's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the Department of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences. CWE, as it is known, caters to working adult students. All classes are held one evening per week for three hours and 20 minutes, and all carry four credits. Approximately 80 percent of our students are female; most are more than 30 years old. ^{1} Due to a university-wide change in admission policy, most students currently entering CWE transfer as rising juniors. ^{2} Virtually no students enter without some earned college credits, and most have already earned credit for college-level "composition" courses, often within the City University of New York system. And yet, many, if not most, admit when entering to feeling ill equipped to write for their upper-division, interdisciplinary electives at CWE.

At its 1981 inception, most students began CWE's Liberal Arts program with little or no college experience. Accordingly, two courses, "Core Humanities I" and "Core Humanities II," were designed as part of a "streamlined" core to help students with college-level writing. The founders designed "Core Humanities I" as an introduction-to-literature course with a heavy writing component (*The Bedford Introduction to Literature* was the adopted text for this class, which I taught between 1997 and 2000 when still a graduate student), and "Core Humanities II," oddly enough, as a course in which students viewed at least a dozen films per semester with the explicit learning goal of enhancing "note-taking" skills. At the high point in its enrollment history, three sections of each were offered each semester with at least 25 students enrolled in each section. Both courses were often taken simultaneously by entering students. And so the program remained until the late 1990s, when a new Dean, Harriet Alonso, decided that "Core Humanities II," at least, needed a revised curriculum and recruited me to help. Shortly after we devised a plan to turn "Core Humanities II" into a more interdisciplinary "arts" course, I left the Center to teach full-time at another CUNY campus, Manhattan Community College, where I soon became Director of Composition. Some revision of the "Core Humanities II" curriculum at CWE succeeded in my absence, but other than the time stolen by the busy Dean, there was no oversight of CWE's core humanities program. It remained taught by a rotating pool of adjuncts given only the most basic outlines of the courses and assigned a classroom, especially after Dean Alonso left the Center to rejoin the History department at The City College's uptown campus. Students still enrolled in "Core I" and "Core II" simultaneously, or even completed "Core II" a semester or two *before* "Core I" due to scheduling needs.

Perhaps the lack of coherence in the Core Humanities sequence did not matter as much lately as it might once have, since by the fall of 2005 (as I moved through the interview process at CWE) most entering students transferred their "composition" credits and many fewer enrolled in the Core Humanities sequence. Due to this change in the student profile, the Center now generally offered no more than two sections of "Core Humanities I" and one of "Core Humanities II"; the enrollment in each section about half what was customary years ago. Nevertheless, the Dean, faculty, and staff of full-time advisors at the Center all admitted awareness of and concern about problems with students' writing. The students themselves often expressed doubts about their preparation and readily enrolled in a wealth of writing classes added over time and offered on a regular basis: at the 100-level, "College Composition," "Grammar," and "Writing, Knowing and Current Events"; at the 200-level, "Writing for the Humanities" and "Writing for the Social Sciences"; and at the 300-level, "The Essay" and "Advanced Grammar." The large number and lack of sequencing of these scheduled courses signaled to me not the cool confidence of a well-designed, successful writing program but rather the high anxiety of a crisis. These courses seemed to me agglomerative. As one didn't seem to "work"—provide adequate preparation for upper-division course work—another was added. Still encountering problems with mechanics? Add grammar courses. Inadequate argumentation skills? Try "The Essay." All these courses occupied valuable "slots" in a limited schedule, and yet, students still clamored for "more writing!" when the results in their upper-division electives were unsatisfactory, or when they repeatedly failed the City University-wide writing exam for rising juniors, the CPE (College Proficiency Exam). Unlike when I began teaching there in 1997, by 2005 it was possible if not common for a student to "transfer" out of the Core Humanities program altogether, enroll in

"The Essay" to buttress concerns about upper-division writing, fail the CPE, backtrack to "College Composition," fail the CPE again, spend a semester in "Writing, Knowing and Current Events" and possibly a grammar course, and finally pass the CPE.

I provide this background to help the reader understand the "program" for which I accepted responsibility when the current Dean, Daniel Lemons, brought me back to CWE as a full-time faculty member, partly to revise and maintain the Core Humanities program.⁽³⁾ When I returned, syllabi for "Core Humanities I" and "Core Humanities II" were designed by those teaching the course. The general, if unarticulated, agreement suggested treating "Core Humanities I" as a genre course for "short" literature—short stories, plays, and a brief drama or two—and "Core Humanities II" as an introduction to the same in longer form—the novel, an epic poem, longer plays. Most instructors included some film as well. But there were no adopted texts, no clear assessment goals, no desired/required outcomes, and no clear sense of where—or if—research fit into the curriculum. Consistent with its approved curriculum and its pared-down core (two four-credit humanities courses, two four-credit social science courses, and two four-credit science courses), CWE's writing program had to remain a two-course sequence. Beyond that requirement, Dean Lemons encouraged change that would prepare students for the sort of interdisciplinary programs he envisioned at the Center, that would make the writing program as a whole more "coherent," that would provide students better outcomes in terms of critical reading, writing and thinking skills, and that would provide the appropriate scaffolding for a WAC initiative also just beginning.

The Core Humanities writing program I proposed suggested some important and necessary changes, especially for what is mostly an interdisciplinary, liberal arts B.A. program. Ideally, I asked for an interdisciplinary, humanities-based, two-course sequence required of all incoming CWE students, regardless of transfer credit. Successful completion of "Core Humanities I" was to be a pre-requisite for enrollment in "Core Humanities II"; the two courses now were to be taken successively, rather than simultaneously. Readings for both courses were to be standardized using units from *Juxtapositions: Ideas for College Writers*, which I believe takes a holistic approach to the teaching of writing. Below follows my proposal for the program, which in turn follows from my approach to the teaching of writing, but I should sound here two cautionary notes. The purpose of this essay most definitely is not to offer in its pages a/the definitive pedagogical agenda; is such an agenda even possible? To the contrary, I hope to enter into or begin a theoretical dialogue, with important ramifications for practice. And though the purpose of this essay certainly is not to sell textbooks, I'll make reference to the ideas and format of *Juxtapositions* because my theories regarding the teaching and learning of writing are now inextricable from its pages. With that said: I proposed that in "Core Humanities I," Units One, Two, Three, Four, and Seven, would, at minimum, be covered (see [Appendix 1](#)). In "Core Humanities II," Units Five, Eight, Nine, Ten or Eleven, and Twelve would be completed, again, at minimum. Each course would require one essay per unit, each with one opportunity for guided revision. Research and citation would be introduced in the latter part of "Core Humanities I" and reinforced throughout "Core Humanities II." Coverage of rhetoric, grammar, and syntax also would be routinely included in these courses. I promised to teach at least one section of "Core Humanities" each semester. Another full-time faculty member, Professor Kathlene Mc Donald, would also routinely teach in the program. The two adjuncts required for full coverage would be drawn from Ph.D. teaching interns I trained at Manhattan Community College while Director of Composition.

The City University Ph.D. program in English requires that all students assigned to teach at its branch campuses complete a fifteen-week, four-credit course entitled "Intern Practicum," the grade for which appears on the Ph.D. transcript. Interns (both new and continuing students) are assigned to their branch campuses at the end of May. The Director of Composition at each campus then contacts them regarding scheduling needs. Once the schedules for all are in place, interns are notified. There followed the predictable question: "Can you help me design a course? I'm terrified!" and an unpredictable response: "Calm down! No advance preparation is necessary. I will send two syllabi in late July, one for your composition courses and one for your practicum with me (see [Appendix 2](#)). The practicum will take care of your preparation for teaching and more. Enjoy your summer." Year after year, interns didn't quite believe me, but I managed to reassure them. In early August, we met at BMCC for an orientation to the physical plant and their courses. In late August we began the practicum in earnest. For the next 16 weeks, we met once a week for at least two hours. We devoted all of that time to talking about course content. Classroom management issues, if any, were left for after the seminar.

We began with introductory first classes, and possible assignments designed to help instructors learn the names of their students and also produce a "diagnostic" writing sample. I also explained the design of the syllabus template for their composition courses, as well as the importance of immediately spelling out proper format for writing assignments to students (word processing), and talked about a worthwhile introduction to argumentation. From there, we proceeded to cover each text of each unit covered in the course. Approaches to teaching the lead texts of each unit as essays, as well as for content, were emphasized. The importance of scaffolding in-class writing assignments leading to the first essay in particular was also covered. (Additional topics discussed are annotated in Units One, Two, Three, Four, and Seven in [Appendix 1](#) below. These do not represent an exhaustive list of what was covered,

just the highlights.) I observed each intern's teaching and each observed my teaching, the intern also completing an observation report about my teaching on the model of those used by the department. Finally, each intern compiled a substantial final project containing a 10-page rationale and a 7-to-10-page teaching apparatus for a "juxtaposition" of interdisciplinary texts of their choice, for any course at any level they chose. I hoped this format would give our interns an edge when they entered the job market, since by the semester's end they could speak knowledgeably to interviewers about syllabus design, pedagogic theory, the usefulness and importance of observation, and curriculum design. Years later, one of these interns, Dan Wuebben, would join me at CWE to teach in the Core program, supervise our writing consultants—usually M.A. students in our Language and Literacy program at the main campus, and lead development workshops for the consultants to acquaint them with the pedagogical theory and aims of this particular writing program and for students in need of additional review or assistance.

Theory Informing the Program

Above, I used the word "holistic" with regard to my approach to the teaching of critical writing. I am of the school that believes critical reading, thinking, speaking, and writing are inextricably intertwined. Accordingly, this program emphasizes, first, the writing of *critical, thesis-based* essays.^{4} *Reading* challenging material, acquiring the skills necessary to prompt critical *thinking* in response to what is read, *speaking* clearly and logically about the argument and possible counterarguments, and finally, being able to transform those spoken arguments into *writing* describes the trajectory I believe most of us follow when composing critical essays. However many of us came to adopt that cognitive pattern, most of today's urban working class students must have the process modeled for them before being able to internalize it. A second, additional, goal of the program is to at least introduce students to interdisciplinarity. The theory underpinning both learning goals is outlined below.

In order to prepare students for college-level writing, it seems to me, instructors must expose students to college-level content in reading as well as essay writing methodology. Though critical reading, writing, thinking, and speaking dialectically interact, for explanatory purposes, I will address separately the ways in which first reading and then writing skills are acquired in CWE's two-course Humanities sequence.^{5}

So far as reading is concerned, the essays, as well as the fiction, autobiography, and other brief texts providing a social context for the theory in each unit, are challenging texts (see Table of Contents in [Appendix 1](#)). In addition to their challenge, these texts demonstrate that *reading*, as well as writing, *is a process* through which students learn to read closely and carefully, to situate texts in relation to other texts (intertextuality), and to situate texts in relation to culture, society and the world (extratextuality). To these ends, *Juxtapositions* contributes in the following ways:

- Significantly, the apparatuses differentiate the lead essay from those texts following and thus show students a number of *approaches* to reading assignments in different genres; students learn strategies for reading essays, fiction, and autobiography each in their own way.
- In addition, the apparatus shows students the importance of outlining essays for maximum comprehension.
- The readings introduce a variety of rhetorical devices that students can make their own.
- A significant number of modes of argumentation, beginning with a basic five-part structure and progressing to more difficult forms, are demonstrated for students by the lead essays.
- Important content with regard to the history of ideas is covered, and the possible connections between and the potential applicability of these ideas to diverse human experiences are shown.
- Social context texts following the lead essays require students to *apply* ideas—if possible in their own creative ways, drawing on their own experiences— not merely to ingest them.
- Student vocabulary grows substantially, in terms both general and specific to the readings.
- The above seems to give students a positive attitude about their learning experience.

With regard to writing, this approach also has its challenges as well as its rewards. But with careful guidance, students experience real growth in their writing:

- From the beginning, students are required to formulate their own arguments in response to the readings. The variety of our students' experiences plays an important role in the point of view taken.

- Proper development of students' ideas, generally in need of constant reinforcement, is accommodated by the revision process.
- Revision encourages students to see writing as a *process*.
- Familiarity with and the use of rhetorical devices, concentration on attention-getting beginnings, and learning to synthesize ideas in order to arrive at a proper "conclusion" to each essay shows students that critical writing does allow for both creativity and "voice."
- The weaving of students' own point of views with those espoused in other texts invites students into academic discourse.
- In order to choose the most quotable text to substantiate their own views, students learn the value of *closereading*.

Believe it or not, the theory behind our second goal, providing students with an introduction to interdisciplinary study, is even more complex and controversial than those pertaining to skill acquisition in reading and writing. The theoretical literature on interdisciplinarity is vast and full of lively debate. Though I have long thought of myself as an "interdisciplinary" teacher, scholarship on the topic has begun to inform me of the complexities of true interdisciplinarity. The definition of interdisciplinarity offered by William Newell offers a helpful start: "What I have in mind are courses that critically drawn upon two or more disciplines and [...] lead to an integration of disciplinary insights" (Newell 53). So far, so good. But Newell then adds the assumption that "interdisciplinary courses are organized around a topic[...] theme, problem, issue, region, cultural or historical period, institution, figure, or idea" (53). In this added sense, our Core Humanities courses are nowhere near interdisciplinary, since they seem to lack the crucial point of integration. And yet, I think they are. Though they lack the "juncture" as Nancy Anne Gluck calls it, I would suggest that in the end, our courses provide not only the necessary scaffolding to prepare students for truly interdisciplinary upper-division courses, but are in themselves at least somewhat interdisciplinary.

In her essay, "Reflections on the Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Humanities," Nancy Anne Gluck defines the terms "disciplinary," "multidisciplinary," and "interdisciplinary." I read this essay with interest because I think it is always useful to define one's terms, and I have seen and heard the word "interdisciplinary," for instance, used in various and sundry ways—so much so that I was unsure of what, exactly, practitioners thought interdisciplinary courses are made. Based on Gluck's thoughts, I no longer teach strictly "disciplinary" courses. Our Core Humanities sequence, however, fits well with Gluck's definition of multidisciplinary in that "it may be characterized as a juxtapositioning of disciplines" (354). The very title of my textbook, *Juxtapositions*, suggests the sequential, consecutive, disciplinary views of the world Gluck envisions in the multidisciplinary classroom, since the book appears to "consider the humanities sequentially through literature, then psychology, then biology" and the units "never intersect upon a well-defined matrix" (354). But to step back a bit, and to add another term, I could call each of the units in *Juxtapositions* "bi-disciplinary"—a humanities text is paired with one from another of a variety of disciplines; and yet, I would add that once a number of units are covered, the course leaves bi-disciplinarity behind and becomes multidisciplinary. And when the final paper assignments for both "Core Humanities I" and "Core Humanities II" challenge students to choose a central focus for their arguments on any text or texts, and apply as many other texts to their arguments as possible, the course at least introduces students to true interdisciplinarity. With this approach, bi-disciplinarity—as a mechanism designed to scaffold multidisciplinary—adds up to more than the sum of its parts, and provides an entry-point into true interdisciplinarity; the difference is that the students, rather than the professor, provide "the nexus on which the disciplines converge" (354). As a capstone experience, the inclusion of a larger work, and/or a juxtaposition of cultural studies "texts" are also encouraged.^{6}

Gluck's essay helped me to articulate some inchoate thoughts about college composition in general, and college composition in an interdisciplinary program in particular. First, there is no reason why composition courses can't also be content courses. Second, content covered, and the way in which it is covered, can turn a composition class into an introduction to interdisciplinarity. As Blaise Pascal so memorably put it, Consciousness is irreversible. Once students take ownership of ideas and information, keeping each unit in any course a discreet entity unto itself becomes impossible; students begin to generate their own knowledge. Though it is always a good idea to define one's terms, terminology without flexibility can be deceptive. In theory, a definition of terms provides us with a clear sense of what a word means, but praxis often adds an element of ambiguity. Helpful to those attempting true interdisciplinarity, I suspect that bi-disciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches are neither antithetical to the interdisciplinary project nor examples of failed attempts at interdisciplinarity. If anything, there is something of a dialectical relationship among all these terms, even in a more traditional interdisciplinary course. Beyond that, in practice, these terms as defined leak into one another in important and useful ways. A momentary reversion to a bi-

disciplinary approach—or for that matter, even a disciplinary approach—can lead to a valuable interdisciplinary insight.

Following on my first point, I wonder if rather than considering disciplinary, bi-disciplinary, multidisciplinary, and interdisciplinary approaches as discrete entities, it may be more useful to think of each as pedagogical bridges to one another. But these bridges should not be imagined in a visual sequence, each falling off into the background as we look ahead to the last longed-for bridge on the horizon: interdisciplinarity. The fact that those wanting to teach with an interdisciplinary approach need expertise in a number of disciplinary “fields” has been widely acknowledged in the literature; the fact that our students have the same need if they are to produce the kinds of projects that demonstrate the well-informed, high-order critical thinking and problem-solving skills we hope for is less emphasized. For that, we all need to cross disciplinary, bi-disciplinary, and multidisciplinary bridges over and over again. I prefer to see interdisciplinarity as an ongoing, free-form, long-distance journey, rather than a destination; and we certainly shouldn’t think of college composition as the first little footbridge passed over as the trip gets underway.

Mechanics of the Program

In addition to what is mentioned above concerning the number of sections offered and those teaching in the program and in its supplemental instruction, I would add here that another recent development has had an influence on the mechanics of our program: our in-progress Middle States accreditation. We have an adopted syllabus now, with learning outcomes clearly outlined. (See [Appendix 3](#).) In spring 2007, an “indirect assessment” of the learning outcomes of seven selected courses was completed and both of our Core Humanities courses were among the selections, as was the “Advanced Composition” course I’ve piloted during the past academic year. For this assessment, instructors chose a sampling of student work demonstrating that their designated outcomes *could* be met and wrote a reflective essay to accompany the package describing the process through which learning outcomes were designed, and what they had learned from this first cycle of design, assessment, and possible revision of either goals or assignments to help students meet goals. A small, internal committee reviewed each package, and the whole was sent to our new Director of Assessment, Annita Alting. Still, additional assessment tools need to be designed and implemented. What form that will take remains to be decided, probably by me, with input from both Ms. Alting and our in-house assessment committee. An ongoing loop of assessment and revision both conforms to the Middle States model and points toward a desirable program goal.

Restraints Guiding the Program’s Growth

With so many students under-prepared for writing assignments, no matter the number of transfer credits, the Dean and I thought it possible to circumvent credit duplication by emphasizing “humanities” in the title of our sequence and avoiding the word “composition.” For reasons ranging to financial aid limitations to credit duplication, requiring students to take an additional two courses at the 100-level proved (to my great disappointment) unworkable. Instead, I had to settle for advisors *recommending* one semester of Core, not all that bad since most students ask for writing courses upon entering. But here the plot thickened once again.

In the past, entering students with anxiety about their writing skills were channeled into “Core Humanities II,” since so many transfer students came directly from my former program at Manhattan Community College. At MCC, the first semester in a two-course writing sequence is “College Composition.” The second is “Introduction to Literature.” Before the change in the program at the Center, leading these students into “Core Humanities I” probably would have resulted in students retaking “Introduction to Literature.” They were therefore sent to “Core Humanities II.” With the new program in place, guiding these students into “Core II” is no longer appropriate. “Core Humanities II” now builds on critical reading, thinking, and writing skills introduced in Core Humanities I.” In addition, most undergraduates likely would find the reading material for “Core II” too difficult without the preparation of “Core I.” It took a year to think things through, but the compromise we reached works quite well. Advisors place incoming students with few or no credits in the Core Humanities courses in the proper sequence. Students entering with an A.A. degree or credit for “Composition I” and “Composition II” who express reservations about their writing abilities are now placed in “Core Humanities I.” We are this fall piloting a three-course interdisciplinary 200-level *intermediate* core, possibly to be required of *all* incoming students (no matter how many transfer credits); one course in this sequence is a writing course again blending theory with artistic, literary, and film texts, but using longer literary texts.

In general, students don’t choose to come to CWE only for the second half of their college course work. They are barred from admission as freshman because of a new testing tool implemented by CUNY in the fall of 2000: the ACT

exam. Failing any part of the ACT exam excludes a student from admission to a senior college in the CUNY system. Since all of our students are returning adults, and since they are overwhelmingly female, they tend to fail the second part of the math exam: basic algebra. This failure is entirely consonant with national trends; nevertheless, it is one that frustrates many of us here—and not just potential students! With so many students turned away and forced into the community college system or other colleges to begin their coursework, our program cannot grow. Our students cannot get the kind of consistent, standardized preparation for college work we would prefer. And we cannot adequately assess, set goals, re-assess when the levels of student preparation we inherit are so uneven and unpredictable.

If I could reinvent this program from scratch I would find a way to require more students to take both courses in the Core Humanities sequence. The small numbers in the program disturb me not because I miss directing that loose and baggy monster of a program at Manhattan Community College, but because a good deal of evidence was mounting that my ideas were helping the student population I want to help gather the requisite skills to succeed in higher learning. Such evidence included the results of a departmental final exam required of all students in ENG 101 and comprising one-third of the final grade, the feedback from students and instructors using the *Juxtapositions* method, the indications that students were putting the disciplinary knowledge they acquired in their composition course to work in other classes, and the anecdotal evidence that *Juxtapositions* students passed the CPE exam. I came to CWE to plant the same seeds of intellectual challenge and growth for a group of students who remind me of me. So far, the program has not lived up to what I believe is its promise.

Appendix 1: *Juxtapositions* Table of Contents

(Units One, Two, Three, Four, and Seven, covered in “Core Humanities I,” are annotated.)

Unit One: The Five-Part Essay

Sigmund Freud: “Second Lecture,” from *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis*

Nathaniel Hawthorne: “Young Goodman Brown”

Bessie Head: from *A Question of Power*

Writing: Introduction/review of the five-part essay; the thesis statement; support paragraphs quoting text; blending of theory with a social context; analogies; essay revision

Reading: Indirect thesis statements; annotation; outlining; sorting out complex sentence structure as in the “three solutions” offered at the end of the essay; reading the essay/reading fiction

Unit Two: Argument Offering an Extended Example as Evidence

Carl Jung: “The Personal and the Collective Unconscious”

Herman Melville: “Bartleby the Scrivener”

D.H. Lawrence: “Snake”

Writing: Support-paragraph development; blending theory and social context, continued; logical connectives

Reading: Alternative essay forms, extended example; comparison/contrast regarding Jung’s and Freud’s theories of the unconscious; reading poetry

Unit Three: The Five-Part Essay within the Five-Part Essay

Martin Luther King: “Letter from Birmingham City Jail”

Ralph Ellison: “Battle Royal”

Erich Fromm: "Disobedience as a Psychological and Moral Problem"

Writing: Support-paragraph development, continued; arguments within the argument; parallelism and antithesis; reference to other authorities on a topic; blending two theories and a social context

Reading: Complex construction of longer arguments; transitions; outlining

Unit Four: The Manifesto

Karl Marx: "Manifesto of the Communist Party"

Toni Cade Bambara: "The Lesson"

Dexter Jeffries: "Sailboats in Central Park," from *Triple Exposure: Black, Jewish and Red* in the 1950s

Writing: Introductions; support paragraph construction/development; synthesis in conclusions; blending conflicting viewpoints and a social context

Reading: Narrative "voice"; essay in sections

Unit Five: Argument by Means of Demonstration

Charles Darwin: "Natural Selection," from *On the Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection*

Shirley Jackson: "The Lottery"

Thomas Eisner: "The Circumventers," from *For Love of Insects*

Unit Six: The Dialogue/Conclusions Drawn from Premises

Plato: "Allegory of the Cave," from *Republic*

Yukio Mishima: "Patriotism"

Michel de Montaigne: "We Taste Nothing Pure"

Roger Sedarat: "Haji as Stick Figure"

Unit Seven: Argument Offering a Hypothetical Example as Evidence/Comparison and Contrast (Woolf) and Argument Directly Engaging the Argument of Another Writer/Citation (Walker)

Virginia Woolf: Chapter One, from *A Room of One's Own*

Alice Walker: "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens"

Ama Ata Aidoo: from *No Sweetness Here*

Writing: Longer essay incorporating a number of points of view; citation

Reading: Introductory research

Unit Eight: Argument Tracing and Revising an Historical Perspective

Thomas Kuhn: "The Nature of Normal Science and Revolutions as Changes in World View," from *The Structure of*

Scientific Revolutions

Gabriel Garcia Marquez: "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings"

Santha Rama Rau: "By Any Other Name," from *Gifts of Passage*

Unit Nine: Cause and Effect

Thorstein Veblen: "The Economics of Woman's Dress"

Sandra Cisneros: "Barbie-Q"

Gerald L. Early: "Life with Daughter: Watching the Miss America Pageant"

Unit Ten: Argument in Fragments/Arguments within the Argument

Friedrich Nietzsche: "Good and Evil," from *On the Genealogy of Morals*

Flannery O'Connor: "Everything That Rises Must Converge"

Niccolò Machiavelli: "On Those Who Become Princes through Wickedness and On Cruelty and Mercy and Whether It Is Better to Be Loved than Feared or the Contrary," from *The Prince*

Unit Eleven: Argument by Means of Paradox/Premises and Conclusions

Hannah Arendt: "Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government," from *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

Tadeusz Borowski: "This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen"

Mark Levine: "Lost on a Saturday"

Unit Twelve: Native American Perspectives

Barbara Alice Mann: "Where Are Your Women?: Missing in Action"

Sherman Alexie: "This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona"

Leslie Marmon Silko: "Long Time Ago"

Appendix 2: Intern Practicum Syllabus

Borough of Manhattan Community College
City University of New York

Course Description:

This course is designed to help teaching interns develop successful strategies for teaching college-level composition. We will be using a reader designed to acquaint students with some "great ideas" in the history of thought. Each of these ideas is argued, but the rhetorical approach to making the argument varies. We will use various techniques to show students the ways in which these arguments are constructed, and to help them decide whether or not the argument is effective. In addition, each of these essays will be juxtaposed with a short story. For each paired unit, the objective is to help students find a way to use the theory in the essay to augment/inform a reading of the fictional text. Our goal then is to teach students to construct original arguments about the fictional text, quoting both fiction and essay texts.

We will also discuss student preparation for the English Department final exam required of English 101 students. This exam grade comprises one-third of the final student grade.

Finally, we will discuss classroom issues as they arise, and important matters such as course pacing, revision of writing, and grading.

Required Texts:

A desk copy of the course text will be provided for each intern. This is the same text that your students will be using in English 101.

Course Requirements:

Steady, punctual attendance is required throughout the semester. Preparation for the practicum should be exactly the same as your preparation for teaching. A guide for each unit will be provided. You need not follow the guide exactly; it is only that, a guide. I welcome your innovations, but for this semester, at least, those innovations must remain within the confines of the given material.

A "juxtaposition" of at least two texts, one theoretical and one context, accompanied by a rationale and teaching apparatus is the final project for this course. This juxtaposition may be one for a class at any level, in any field. The rationale for combining the two texts should be 8-10 pages typewritten. The texts should be provided. A 7-10-page teaching apparatus should follow the texts.

Appendix 3: Outcomes

Upon completion of "Core Humanities I," students should be able to:

- Read essays and short fiction critically, with close attention to the language of the text.
- Isolate the main idea of an essay, whether stated explicitly or implicitly by the author.
- Outline a complicated argument, comprehending points made in defense of the argument and conclusions reached.
- Recognize a number of structures of argumentation.
- Feel comfortable with reading from a range of disciplines.
- Enjoy at least a passing familiarity with a variety of terms common to an interdisciplinary academic lexicon: repression, archetype, "normal" science, paradigm shift, totalitarianism, ideology, feminism, civil rights, evolution, natural selection, etc.
- Write a concise summary of a long, complicated text
- Compose a text-based argumentative essay of at least 750 words, with proper quotation and citation of sources.
- Apply theory to a social context.
- Recognize and use effectively a number of common rhetorical devices.
- Exhibit competence in the forms and protocols of text-based college writing.

Upon completion of "Core Humanities II," students should be able to:

- Read the longer essay and longer short fiction critically, with close attention to the language of the text.

- Read longer, more complex texts with a high degree of comprehension.
- Understand and grapple with complexities/contradictions in writers such as Arendt and Nietzsche.
- Recognize and understand even some of the most indirect structures of argumentation (e.g. argument by paradox, negative dialectic).
- Acknowledge real growth in vocabulary, both general and academic.
- Summarize succinctly.
- Compose a text-based essay of at least 1250 words, with proper quotation and citation of sources.
- Apply theory to a social context with sophistication and originality.
- Employ an appropriate range of rhetorical devices in essay composition.
- Write with verve and sophistication about a range of complex topics, taken from a number of disciplines, incorporating a number of viewpoints with their own.

Notes

1. Spring 2007 student data reveals that 76.4% of our students are more than 30 years of age; 80.2% are female. ([Return to text.](#))
2. Of the new transfer students accepted for the spring 2007 semester, 50.6% have earned between 61 and 77 credits prior to enrollment at CWE. An additional 19.5 students have earned <77 credits. ([Return to text.](#))
3. I returned with four years' experience supervising a large composition program and a just-published interdisciplinary composition textbook, *Juxtapositions: Ideas for College Writers*. Total student enrollment at CWE runs to about 750 students. At Manhattan Community College student enrollment grew from approximately 16,000 to almost 21,000 during the years I directed the composition program. Unlike CWE, most students entered Manhattan Community College with few, if any, transfer credits. Consequently, the number of sections of ENG 101 and ENG 201 offered each semester during my tenure there rose from about 70 of each to more than 90 of each. Classes were capped at 27, but were often over enrolled to just above 30. ([Return to text.](#))
4. A wide variety of creative writing courses are also offered regularly at the Center. ([Return to text.](#))
5. At a meeting concerning the correlation between CPE results and the composition course at Manhattan Community College in spring 2005 attended by Sharona Levy (Director of the CPE), Dean Erwin Wong, English Chair Phil Eggers, and myself, Dean Wong stated his concern that in-house research recently indicated that there was no correlation between passing English 101 and passing the CPE exam, since only students who earned a grade of B or better in English 101 passed the CPE exam in any significant numbers. Sharona Levy interjected that the latest CUNY Central Administration statistics indicated instead a direct correlation between students' ACT *reading* scores and successful CPE outcomes. My response was that the statistics cited by Dean Wong *did* indicate a correlation between English 101 and CPE pass rates, though not the desired one (only those doing well in English 101 pass), and a lack of surprise at Professor Levy's announcement, since it is consonant with my own findings. We all wanted to validate both findings by tracking the students' results from the past few years trained with *Juxtapositions*. (The numbers had grown substantially in the past year, especially, but we supposed it was too early for these students to be included in CPE statistics at hand.) I suspect that had we been able to track these students (which current data-acquisition and sorting did not allow), the correlation Dean Wong was hoping for—that even students with relatively poor outcomes in English 101 pass the CPE—would obtain, because the reading required increases the comprehension of students with poor reading as well as writing skills. ([Return to text.](#))
6. For example, Professor Kathlene McDonald suggested adding a “full-length work” as a capstone experience in “Core Humanities I,” Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Doing so is an excellent idea, as the addition would once again demonstrate the flexibility of ideas covered in the “lead” essay of each unit. Morrison's novel easily lends itself to further exploration/application of Sigmund Freud's theory of the unconscious, of Carl

Jung's theory of archetypes, of Karl Marx's ideas regarding social class in capitalistic societies, of Martin Luther King's call for civil rights, and of Virginia Woolf's and Alice Walker's theories regarding the operations of gender, race, and class in feminist socio-cultural readings. It should be noted, however, that the "text" used for this purpose need not be a literary one: the recent Doctors Without Borders exhibit, "Democratic Republic of the Congo: The Forgotten War," and a recent article in the *NY Review of Books* about an exhibit in Belgium revisiting the Congo's colonization would work equally well, since both lend themselves to further discussion of the same five theories mentioned above with regard to Morrison's novel. ([Return to text.](#))

Works Cited

Clark, Marlene, ed. *Juxtapositions: Ideas for College Writers*. 3rd ed. Boston: Longman/Pearson, 2007.

Newell, William H., ed. *Interdisciplinarity: Essays from the Literature*. New York: Henry Holt, 1998.

"Core Humanities Program, City College Center for Worker Education" from *Composition Forum* 17 (Fall 2007)

© Copyright 2007 Marlene Clark.

Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike License](#).